

Michigan Continues Slow but Steady Population Growth

Michigan is continuing its recent pattern of slow but steady growth, according to new population estimates released by the Census Bureau on December 18. The state's estimated population for July 2003 is 10,079,985, which is 1.4% higher than the 2000 census count of 9,938,444.

Migration Patterns. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the new figures is that Michigan does not appear to have lost population through migration in recent years. A small amount of net out-migration has been normal for Michigan in recent decades—the state has had more out-migrants than in-migrants in almost every year since 1970. However, migration had very little impact on the state's latest population estimates. Michigan's estimated net loss of 78,000 residents to other states since the 2000 Census was more than offset by an estimated net gain of 82,000 residents from other countries.

This is surprising because of several factors that tend to have an adverse effect on Michigan's migration patterns. Recent adverse developments include a recession and the movement of military reserves and National Guard troops to foreign countries. Ongoing factors that contribute to migration from Michigan include the enlistment of young people in the regular military and the movement of retirees to the sunbelt. Since Michigan no longer has any major military bases, nearly all Michigan natives serving in the military—along with any dependents who accompany them—are counted at military installations in other states or in foreign countries.

A likely explanation for the Census Bureau's favorable finding with respect to migration is that all of the other states have also experienced weak job markets in the latest recession. Since no region has been experiencing an economic boom, unemployed Michigan residents have had less incentive to move elsewhere than in prior downturns.

Trends in Births and Deaths. Since net migration has been negligible, the primary reason for Michigan's population growth is that the number of births has remained greater than the number of deaths. Consistent with recent trends, however, the number of births has declined from year to year while the number of deaths has risen. The increasing number of deaths reflects aging of the large generations born prior to the Great Depression. The decreasing number of births reflects aging of the even larger generation born during the Baby Boom and its replacement by smaller generations of potential parents who were born in the 1970's and 1980's..

The number of births from April 2000 to July 2003 is down 10 percent relative to the corresponding period a decade earlier, and the number of deaths is up 10 percent. Natural increase—the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths—is down 36 percent.¹

This pattern of decreasing births and increasing deaths explains why Michigan's estimated population grew more slowly from April 2000 to July 2003 (+1.4%) than it did from April 1990 to July 1993 (+2.0%).² If Michigan's natural increase had been the same as a decade earlier, the state's population would have grown by 2.4%.

Comparison to Other States. Although Michigan's population has grown, it has grown more slowly than the population of the nation as a whole. In addition to the factors noted above which affect migration, this slow growth reflects the fact that Michigan attracts a smaller share of foreign migrants than states in the south and west which are closer to the Mexican border.

Michigan's population has dropped from 3.53 percent of the national total in April 2000 to 3.47 percent of the national total in July 2003. This has fiscal implications, since many federal programs use population estimates as a basis for allocating funds.

Only 15 other states gained more people than Michigan during the period covered by the new estimates. In terms of percent growth, however, Michigan ranks 38th among the states. The highest rates of growth continue to be in the Southwest, the South, and the West. (See Table 1.)

¹ From April 1990 to July 1993, Michigan residents had an estimated 480,247 births and 259,024 deaths, for a natural increase of 221,223 persons. From April 2000 to July 2003, Michigan residents had an estimated 428,261 births and 285,979 deaths, for a natural increase of 142,282. These estimates from the Census Bureau differ slightly from official vital statistics produced by the Michigan Department of Community Health.

² Based on population estimates released by the Census Bureau in December, 1993.